

REMARKS

The Office Action mailed December 22, 2003 has been received and the Examiner's comments carefully reviewed. Claims 1-9 have been allowed. Applicants thank the Examiner for this notification. Claims 10-12 have been amended. No new subject matter has been added. Claims 1-12 are currently pending. Applicants respectfully submit that the pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Support for the amendments to claims 10-12 is found in the specification, for example, on page 13, lines 10-16.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102

The Examiner rejected claims 10-12 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Hansen et al. (U.S. Patent 5,988,299). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection, but have amended claims 10-12 to advance this application to allowance. Applicants reserve the right to pursue the original subject matter via a continuing application.

Claim 10 has been amended to clarify that that method for operating a drilling machine includes determining whether a rod grip is clamped or unclamped, and adjusting the maximum available thrust that can be provided by a longitudinal drivers depending upon whether the rod grip is clamped or unclamped.

The claimed method limits the maximum longitudinal thrust available so that damage to rod threads is avoided when, for example, a rod is unthreaded from a drill string. Because the maximum thrust is limited, an operator cannot inadvertently apply too much force or thrust. In particular, the maximum available thrust is limited and an operator cannot apply a thrust amount greater than what is available.

Hansen discloses a rig servicing system. The system has a pair of tong assemblies for automatically disconnecting or connecting rods. The Examiner stated that longitudinal movement of tongs must be controlled because longitudinal movement of the tongs is necessary to make or break pipe joints.

Hansen, however, does not disclose a method including adjusting the maximum available thrust depending upon whether the rod grip is clamped or unclamped. While an operator of the Hansen machine may manually control the actual amount of thrust applied, the operator can still inadvertently apply too much thrust and thereby damage pipe threads.

In other words, whether or not the tong assemblies of Hansen are opened or closed, a full range of thrust can still be applied. Hansen does not teach limiting the full range of thrust, or adjusting the maximum available thrust, so that only a particular amount of thrust can be applied. Rather, the operator can apply the full amount of thrust at any time regardless of whether the tong assemblies are open or closed. In the claimed method, an operator can only apply an adjusted amount of thrust depending upon whether the rod grip is clamped or unclamped.

Applicants therefore respectfully submit that claim 10, and dependent claims 11 and 12 are patentable.

Allowable Subject Matter

Claims 1-9 are allowed. Applicants thank the Examiner for this notification.

SUMMARY

It is respectfully submitted that each of the presently pending claims (claims 1-12) is in condition for allowance and notification to that effect is requested. The Examiner is invited to contact Applicants' representative at the below-listed telephone number if it is believed that prosecution of this application may be assisted thereby.

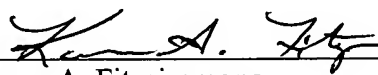
Although certain arguments regarding patentability are set forth herein, there may be other arguments and reasons why the claimed invention is patentably distinct. Applicants reserve the right to raise these arguments in the future.

Respectfully submitted,



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